

Navigating Special Needs Services in Westchester County

A step-by-step visual roadmap for securing eligibility, funding, and lifelong support.



Act Before You Need It

The process to obtain eligibility takes time. You want to be ready when a great program opens up or circumstances change.



1 Year

The Timeline:
Securing eligibility can take up to one full year.



The Window:
Assessments submitted for application must have been completed within the past year.

Pro-tip: Align your paperwork with your child's annual reevaluation meeting.



The Reassurance:
There is no penalty for obtaining eligibility and not accessing services immediately.

The Exception: Once granted, you do not need to reapply, unless granted temporary eligibility (which happens for children under 8 years old).

Does the individual reside in NY and require support services?

Diagnosed before age 22 with a developmental disability (e.g., Autism, Intellectual Disability, Cerebral Palsy).

Causes significant impairment in at least three areas (Communication, Mobility, Self-care).

[OPWDD]

Pathway
(Office for People With Developmental Disabilities)

The primary concern is Mental Health, rather than a developmental disability.

[SPOA]

Pathway
(Single Point of Access)

Contact Westchester County SPOA at
914-995-5352 or
CMHS@westchestercountyny.gov
(Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm).

[OPWDD]

The State Agency.

Determines eligibility and oversees all developmental disability services in NY State.

[DDRO]

The Regional Office.

Hudson Valley Developmental Disabilities Regional Office.
(Contact: Elise Velez, LMSW,
info@opwdd.ny.gov, 518-388-0398).

The Student & Family

[Medicaid]

The Funding.

Services are funded through an [HCBS] (Home and Community-Services) waiver. Eligibility is needs-based based strictly on the child's income, not the parents'.

[CCO]

The Guides.

Care Coordination Organizations provide Care Managers to help navigate traditional waivers and Self-Direction.

(Westchester Options: Advance Care Alliance, Care Design NY, LIFEPlan CCO NY)

Track 1: Enrolling in Medicaid

Apply for Medicaid via
ACCESS NYC to access
HCBS waiver funds.

Support: Westchester
Disabled on the Move
(Community Service
Society of NY) can
process your application.

Contacts: Sandra Hehetror
(914-968-4717 Ext. 110) or
Lauryn Mathena (Ext. 117).

**Eligibility
Confirmed**

Track 2: The **OPWDD** Front Door

Watch the mandatory
**OPWDD Front Door
Videos** online.

**Submit eligibility
documents** using the
official **Transmittal Form**
(or have your **CCO** Care
Manager do this for you).

Plan of Care (POC)
Developed by your
Care Manager.

Family Support & Respite

[FSS]

Family Support Services: Resources, recreation, and training for caregivers. (Note: Does not require Medicaid enrollment).

Respite: Temporary relief for caregivers in-home, at camp, or at residential settings.

Day & Employment

Community Habilitation: 1-on-1 training for daily living skills and community inclusion.

Day Habilitation: Structured programs out-of-home or 'Without Walls' for independence and volunteer work.

Employment: Supported Employment (on-the-job coaching) and Prevocational Services (building fundamental work habits).

Residential Options

IRAs & Supported IRAs: Certified homes or supportive services for independent living.

Family Care: Living in a certified family's home with extensive support.

[ISH] **Integrated Supportive Housing:** Affordable housing combined with services.

Advocacy & Independence

[ILCs] **Independent Living Centers:** Peer counseling and skills training.

[SANYS] [Parent to Parent NYS] [DRNY] **Organizations:** Self-Advocacy Association of NYS, Parent to Parent NYS, Disability Rights New York.

[ILCs] **Other:** Environmental/vehicle modifications, adaptive equipment.

Choosing Your Path: The Power Shift

Traditional Waiver Services

Who chooses the services?

Pre-packaged programs offered by established provider agencies.

Who manages the staff?

Agencies hire, schedule, and manage the support staff.

Who controls the funding?

Funds go directly from the state to the agency providing the service.

[Self-Direction]

Who chooses the services?

You and your child build a custom mix of services tailored to specific life goals.

Who manages the staff?

You recruit, hire, and manage your own support staff directly.

Who controls the funding?

You control a specific budget based on your child's needs, managed through a **Fiscal Intermediary**.

The Self-Direction Team

[COS] Circle of Support

The core team. Includes family, friends, and chosen advocates who help brainstorm and guide life decisions.

The Individual

Support Broker

Your operational guide. They help you develop your custom plan, submit the budget to the state, and provide ongoing maintenance support.

[FI] Fiscal Intermediary

Your administrative backbone. They do not dictate your choices; they handle the payroll, billing, and administrative tasks required to employ your own staff.

Your Journey to Self-Direction



What if we are denied OPWDD eligibility?

General Guidance & Referrals

[CYSHCN]

(Children with Special Health Care Needs Program)

Entity: Westchester County Department of Health.

Function: Provides high-level guidance, service referrals, and system navigation for children with special health needs.

Education & Employment Transition

[ACCES-VR]

(Adult Career & Continuing Education Service)

Entity: NY State Education Department (White Plains District Office).

Function: Focuses strictly on pre-vocational rehabilitation, transition services, and job training for students and adults.

Comprehensive Community Support

[WIHD]

(Westchester Institute for Human Development)

Function: A major regional hub providing medical, dental, speech, and specialized support services for individuals with disabilities.

The Lifelong Master Blueprint

Childhood / School Age

Childhood Foundation & Eligibility

- **Action:** Apply for Medicaid and **[OPWDD]** Eligibility. Establishes primary funding source for supports.
- **Action:** Establish a Care Manager and select services (Traditional or Self-Directed).

Ongoing Maintenance

System Review & Budget Alignment

- **Action:** Update the **[DDP-2]** assessment every 2 years (or whenever the individual's support needs change) to ensure the budget matches reality. Critical for maintaining appropriate funding levels.

Approaching Age 18 (The Legal Shift)

Transition to Adulthood & Legal Protections

- Action 1: Guardianship.** Once a child turns 18, parents no longer have automatic legal authority. Apply for Guardianship through the Surrogate's Court (special needs law firms can assist).
- Action 2: Asset Protection. Establish a Supplemental Needs Trust.** This protects the individual's personal assets while ensuring they retain their eligibility for vital public benefits.